

Traffic Safety News and Facts for Employers February 17, 2006

Michigan News

Michigan Takes Steps To Remove Speed Gap Between Trucks, Other Vehicles

Backed by advocates who say it will make roads safer by improving traffic flow and more closely resembling "85th percentile" speeds, the Michigan State Senate approved a bill that would increase the 55 mph speed limit for trucks to 60 mph on highways where the maximum limit is 70 mph. The higher limit would apply to vehicles with a gross weight of 10,000 pounds or more and truck-tractors with trailers. Other motorists would continue to drive at the current 70 mph limit. For more information visit http://www.landlinemag.com/todays_news/Daily/2006/Feb06/0202006.htm

GM's OnStar Gets An Upgrade

General Motors Corp. is planning to launch a new version of its OnStar driver-support service. OnStar will begin offering a new feature called Turn-by-Turn Navigation, which uses automated voice prompts to guide drivers to their destinations. The new feature presents an answer to complaints about in-dash mapping systems that critics say may cause driver distraction. Read the full article at <http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060207/AUTO01/602070414/1148>

Latest Traffic Safety News

Motorcyclists In Iowa Promote Safe Riding Legislation

Hundreds of motorcycle enthusiasts lobbied lawmakers in Iowa to require biker awareness training for new riders and send a message to motorists who ignore them. The legislation would require all driver education taught in Iowa to include motorcycle awareness. It would also let judges impose additional fines of \$200 to \$1,000 and driver's license suspensions of 30 to 180 days for riders whose violations hurt or kill any driver. Read the full article at <http://desmoinesregister.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060209/NEWS10/602090374/1011>

Safety Technology Has Its Limits

Automakers have installed an array of hardware and software to increase safety, but devices have limits, according to a recent report by Business Week. Safety devices may not work as advertised due to human error or poor driving behavior. Consider anti-lock brakes. According to Business Week, drivers with anti-lock brakes engage in higher instances of tailgating, speeding, and sudden lane changes. Some safety experts suspect that many middle-aged and older drivers don't know how to use anti-lock brakes. Read the full article at http://www.businessweek.com/autos/content/jan2006/bw20060126_181437.htm

Traffic.com Makes Personalized Traffic Information Free To Users

Traffic.com, a leading provider of accurate, real-time traffic information, announced that its personalized premium mobile services are now offered free of charge. Traffic.com's customized traffic services give drivers in 35 U.S. major metropolitan areas real-time traffic information.. Users can personalize and save their daily commutes or travel routes by visiting www.traffic.com. For more information visit http://home.businesswire.com/portal/site/google/index.jsp?ndmViewId=news_view&newsId=20060208005209&newsLang=en

Blue Light Theory Sheds New Light On Fatigued Shift Workers

Scientists have found that the body's biological clock is very responsive to exposure to the shorter blue light spectrum. Exposure to blue light helps to initiate when melatonin is released and it is being incorporated into bright light therapy for treatment of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Now, new research has found that exposure to blue light may help shift workers to stay awake and alert when on the job over night. A recent study conducted by researchers at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School showed that blue light contributed to quicker reaction times, fewer lapses in attention and less sleepiness. The participants' brain activity also showed increased alertness upon exposure to blue light. The findings may prove useful for shift workers such as doctors, nurses, pilots and others whose schedules require them to work in the evenings and sleep during the day.

New Device To Do With Morning Ice Scrapings?

Mornings spent scraping off ice from the windshield may be a thing of the past. New technology, which heats screen fluid to melt ice, could revolutionize winter mornings. Known as 'HotShot', the technology works by passing the windshield wash through a heating chamber, which works even without the engine running. The device will be offered on Cadillac and Buick model with other carmakers expected to follow suit.

NIOSH And Partners Host NORA Meetings

In 1996, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) joined with employers, the employee community, and academic institutions to develop the National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA). This ongoing effort established a collaborative blueprint for planning and conducting research that does the most to prevent serious, disabling, and sometimes fatal workplace injuries and illnesses. On April 18-20, the NORA Symposium will be held in Washington, D.C. The symposium will celebrate the first 10 years of NORA and look forward to the next decade. To register, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/nora/symp06/default.html>

NYC City Mayor Bloomberg Shows Support For Speed Prevention Devices

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg voiced support for placing devices atop taxis and private vehicles that would light up when motorists exceed the speed limit, making speeders easy prey for cops. He mentioned seeing such alarms used in Singapore. And in Canada, government officials are investigating a system that uses Global Positioning Satellite technology to enforce speed limits by making it difficult to push down a vehicle's gas pedal once the speed limit is reached. Read the full article at <http://www.nydailynews.com/front/story/388422p-329536c.html>

Design Changes In SUVs, Trucks Reduces Deaths Involving Passenger Vehicles

Design changes in sport utility vehicles and pickups have reduced deaths in cars struck by the large vehicles, according to a new study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. The number of deaths of drivers in cars caught in side-impact crashes with SUVs dropped nearly 50 percent when automakers lowered the height of SUVs or added impact-absorbing bars below the front bumpers, the report says. Read the full article at

<http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060204/BUSINESS01/602040360/1014> For more information visit, www.iihs.org

Blind Spots In The Front Of The Vehicle Prove Deadly For Children

Most drivers know about the blind spots behind and to the sides of their cars. But according to a news report by CBS, few realize that the area in front of them is just as dangerous. The television network reported that at least 33 children were killed last year by drivers who could not see them because the kids were in the blind spot in front of the car. These tragedies are quickly becoming known as front-

over crashes. Read the full report at

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/02/02/earlyshow/living/ConsumerWatch/main1274417.shtml>

Enhancing Pedestrian Safety With Technology

Pedestrians account for more than eleven percent of all roadway fatalities. It is estimated that one-half of those deaths result from pedestrian inattention or error while the other half are the driver's fault. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, no focused effort exists to understand how to apply technology in a coordinated and integrated manner to address this safety issue. Now, the Federal Highway Administration and the Intelligent Transportation Systems Joint Program Office are exploring initiatives for vehicle-based detection and warning systems. Read the full article at <http://www.advancedimagingpro.com/publication/article.jsp?pubId=1&id=2351>

UNC Highway Safety Research Center Releases Online Newsletter

The University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center (HSRC) has released the latest issue of its online newsletter. This issue of "Directions" includes articles on a new center to address the safety of young drivers, HSRC research to develop improved crash reduction factors, contributions of researchers at HSRC to safety guidelines for U.S. states, and more. For more information visit <http://www.hsrmc.unc.edu/directions/2006/winter/HSRC%20Directions%20-%20Winter%202006.pdf>

New Report On Cell Phone Use, Highway Safety

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) released a report examining state crash data, academic studies of risks, and public opinion associated with cell phone use and other driver distraction issues. The report also includes a summary of state, federal, and international legislation in the area of driver distraction. For more information visit <http://www.ncsl.org/print/transportation/cellphoneup805.pdf>

Survey Hones In On New Car Shoppers' Priorities

New online survey takes a closer look at U.S. consumers' priorities when purchasing a new car or truck. According to survey results, the bottom line for new vehicle shoppers was the bottom line. Forty-six percent of respondents put purchase price above everything else in their buying considerations. Thirty-one percent listed the make and model of the vehicle as their "most important" concern. Performance and safety tied for third place as the "most important" consideration in the survey. Read the full article at <http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/2006/02/08/AUTO03/602080386/1149/AUTO01>

News from the USDOT:

FMCSA Administrator Resigns

Annette Sandberg, Administrator of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), announced that she will resign her post effective March 1, 2006. While serving as administrator, Sandberg pushed to establish up-to-date hours of service regulations for commercial drivers.

NHTSA Cars, Trucks Staying On The Roads Longer

A new report released by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) revealed that typical passenger cars are now surpassing 150,000 miles, while most pickups, SUVs, and vans are crossing the 180,000-mile barrier. A report in 1995 said most passenger cars broke 125,000 miles and light trucks typically reached the 150,000-mile mark. The report found that, in terms of years, passenger cars are lasting longer, while SUVs and other light trucks are not running as long as before. The report also said nearly 79 percent of 10-year-old passenger cars are still on the road, up seven percentage points for comparable vehicles in the 1995 data.

NHTSA: Air Bag Deaths Nearly Zero

No adults and two children died from airbag-induced injuries in the United States in 2005, according to the latest National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) crash statistics. To date, NHTSA estimates that airbags have saved 18,913 lives. Deaths resulting from injuries inflicted by deploying airbags peaked in 1997, when 53 people died, including 31 children. Read the full article at <http://www.autonews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060206/SUB/60202028/1003/newsletter02&refsect=newsletter02>

Compact Cars Earn New Distinction: Highest Fatality Rate

Drivers might love them for their low gas mileage, but according to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), compact cars have the highest fatality rate. Compact cars had a fatality rate of 17.76 people per 100,000 vehicles in 2004, followed by compact pickup trucks with 16.87 and subcompact vehicles with 16.85, according to a report by NHTSA. Large vans had the lowest rate, 9.34, while pickup trucks and sport utility vehicles had rates of about 15 deaths.

International Traffic Safety News:

UK Fleets Urged To Incorporate Electronic Stability Control (ESC) Systems On Vehicles

Drivers and fleet in the UK are being urged to fit vehicles with stability control systems. Commonly called ESC, the system brings together a number of technologies to stop a car from skidding out of control during extreme maneuvers. A stability control system intervenes through removing power or braking individual wheels, to keep the vehicle headed where the driver intended.

Most Wanted Vehicle Upgrade: Satellite Navigation

Satellite navigation systems have replaced air-conditioning as the most requested option among fleets in the UK. As technology becomes cheaper, drivers are getting accustomed to such extras but from a fleet management point of view, it's worth working out whether the options will also add extra value to the fleet. According to industry experts, the most common optional extras include metallic paint, air-conditioning and satellite navigation.

New Survey Gives UK A Revealing Look At Seat Belt Use

Nearly a third of UK drivers have failed to wear a seat belt in the past year, according to new research. A survey by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) found that Londoners were the worst culprits and those under the age of 35 were much more likely to ignore safety advice to buckle up.